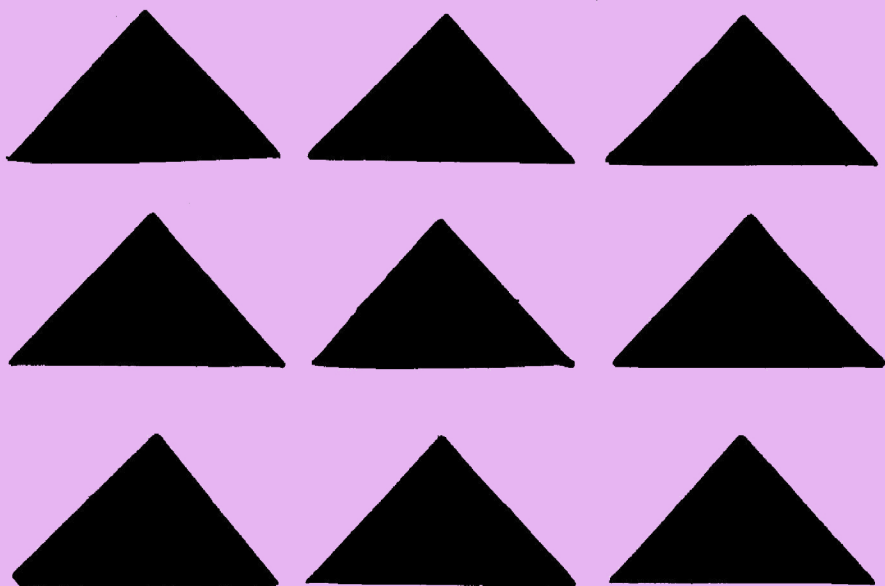


*Mutual Aid Printing*  
*and the Pandemic & Other Essays*

Jamie Berrout



## **Author's Note**

I can't be the only one who understands they shouldn't be here. That they've been living on a breath borrowed from those who didn't survive the unbroken nightmare we call racial capitalism, settler colonialism, empire, or white supremacist patriarchy.

It took a leap into the arms of queers I had never met in order for me to become the person before you. I had no place to

live, no money, nothing but words. They shared their home with me, and the love I found there, in a crowded apartment, on the dunes of a beach, in the shadows of redwood trees, poured life into me. And for seven years I did not stop writing.

Now through an equal but opposite leap I'll return the love I've received and transform once more. These are my last words, a declaration that I will cease to exist.

I may not be ready to make myself into a weapon in the "truly ballistic sense", as Achille Mbembe helpfully describes the suicide bomber (read *Necropolitics*). But I want to offer my departure and this work as a different kind of weapon: a critical

lens, a source of rage, an example of refusal, and a call to action.

Remember me by the skeletal grin of the calaveras dreamed up by Leopoldo Mendez and Lola Cueto and before them Posada and still before him the Manilla family and the constellation of Mexican folk traditions from which we were nourished and to which we returned, where the dead are not strangers inaccessible to the living but rather companions who hunger and laugh riotously and who brush up against the ordinary goings-on of life where, though intangible, they remain participants.

Let my funeral be a celebration. Choosing this death allows me to strike before I can be pacified, bought out, co-

opted, or physically destroyed by the institutions that carry out racial capitalism. I reject the tragic ending that poverty and exposure to terrible risks and deprivations promised me all my life. But neither will I let any of us hold out hope that things can get better for the trans artist under the current system of production.

I explained this dilemma when I wrote about why the Trans Women Writers Booklet Series had to end prematurely, arguing there was no way an independent trans cultural worker could sustain their artistic practice. Either they'd burn out from being overworked and underpaid or they'd end up running into the arms of the enemy—the universities, nonprofits, corporations, and other institutions that

terrorize our communities to begin with—in a two-fold betrayal that turns them into tokenized official artists while trapping all others in the role of passive consumers denied the chance to participate in cultural production.

Every trans writer with a published book or an agent is guilty of this betrayal, and they should not be allowed to forget it. The same goes for every artist or musician, every scholar or cultural worker with equivalent advancement in the institutions. If they will not abolish themselves, then they must be abolished alongside their institutions.

Did I die because I had nothing more to offer? The opposite is true—my unfinished

and unrealized works constitute the fuel in this incendiary weapon.

There will never be a full length poetry book by Jamie Berrout that gathers hundreds of pages of radical poems, a project on the scale of Wendy Trevino's *Cruel Fiction*, though, crucially, not written by a nonprofit radical with thousands of dollars to spare. There will never be a revised edition of the 2014 novel manuscript titled *Otros valles*, which would have been published years ago if the editors and writers of Topside Press hadn't been racist shitheads. There will never be a finished version of the translated *Collected Poems of Esdras Parra* by Jamie Berrout with critical and biographical writings that incorporate the renewed attention to her work by

Venezuelan scholars. Initial efforts began years ago, but there will be no translations of the work of Mexican communist/mystic poet Concha Urquiza, nor of indigenous (Caxcan) Mexican writer and revolutionary Juana Belén Gutiérrez de Mendoza by Jamie Berrout. There will never be another short story collection or new novel by Jamie Berrout, though various efforts have been under way for years. There will never be another publishing series edited by Jamie Berrout, though plans for a trans science fiction magazine, a trans communist poetry journal, and so on will someday be unearthed in my journals.

This accounting only hints at the body of work that will be lost. I've released several books worth of writing every year for the



past seven years—which has also included critical essays, book reviews, interviews, research notes, cover designs, and other ephemeral works related to trans literature—there's no reason why I couldn't continue to do the same indefinitely if I had the time and money.

I choose death precisely because I know I could have that money and continue writing forever, like the vampires associated with Topside, if I made all the right decisions—and it terrifies me because of the harm to others that would result from making those compromises. It's that harm, what happens when writers are neutralized and turned into a diverse set of counter-revolutionary mannequins

by institutions, that is the subject of these essays. Becoming that sort of writer scares me more than dissolving myself into nothing and living in a condition of absolute precarity until the end of time.

Who am I to ask such things? I'm truly no one now. Just one more sex worker with an interchangeable name and a story to tell. And yes, I do think every trans artist and writer who collects a check from the institutions should abandon their good name and instead sell their ass for a living. They'll never hear from me again unless we meet as fellow workers in the tunnels, the underground factory floor made up by the fan sites, bedroom cam studios, airbnb incalls, strip clubs, almost-banned accounts, street corners, and phone sex lines where I and my colleagues labor and

organize and create unrecognized artworks of the highest order.

These essays are addressed to the trans youth who deserve revolution and yet find themselves trapped in purgatory by the opportunists of my generation and their bosses. The more I've written over the years, the more I've wanted to work with younger writers and share what I've learned—the worst thing about having to leave is that we'll never get to have those conversations. Posada has a print where a calavera is depicted weeping over a grave, tears dripping from its vacant eye sockets, while other skeletons laugh as they observe the scene—death doesn't stop me from writing this with tears in my eyes,

thinking about everything that's been taken from us.

Don't waste a second thinking of returning me to the living. If nothing else, I hope my death gives you a sense of the countless other marginalized artists and writers whose work you will never see, who have been killed or sidelined by the structural forces I write about. The trans writers and thinkers we long for will not survive, much less publish a word, unless we recognize them as our missing friends and disappeared collaborators who have been isolated by racism and poverty, separated from us by borders, and put into prisons—but a form of mutual aid rooted in cooperation, that subverts publishing to work towards revolution and against the institutions, can save them

from an early death and you as well.

Every trans person can be an artist. Every trans person should be given that chance, starting with the most marginalized. We need each other: the masses of silenced writers need comrades and resources, and all of us need their work to sustain and challenge us in ways that corporate-funded arts cannot. But the distinction between artist and audience needs to be erased by a proliferation of mutual aid funds, prison outreach and book programs, free schools and workshops, worker-run artist collectives, and at the same time the abolition of universities, publishers, and art institutions along with their financial backers. If this struggle were to succeed, it would be the beginning of the end for this

world.

That is how I wish to be avenged.

Let my death form a splinter and like a threaded needle allow you to pull the past, present, and future so close together that you can see them play against and within the other: the way the past remains dynamic and alive in the sense that countless disappeared revolutionaries and their works remain to be uncovered as sources of wisdom and inspiration; the way the future is already predetermined by the brutal trajectory of liberalism and reform under racial capitalism which promises 500 more years of genocide; the way the present is a shivering mirage that moves alternately in slow motion and compressed time, frightfully unreal

except at rare instances, like the uprising that followed George Floyd's murder, when everything comes into question and every second carries the possibility of a redemption that cuts across all time—when every failed revolution, every attempt, is retroactively made into a victory by its having brought us a step closer to the decisive moment; when every condemned soul in future generations has their fate opened to the possibility of liberation; when our collective actions strip away what this world has done to us and even time itself to reveal new ways of existing together: the living and the dead and the not yet.

**1.**

**Why**

**Poetry?**



*In memory of Walter Wallace Jr.*

1.

IT WAS IN MARCH, at the height of the lockdown, that I wrote into a poem, “just now / the comfortable people / begin to feel vulnerable / they are right / there is no turning / back. today / the cherry tree blossoms / for no one / the hammer in its drawer / resonates. the calendar / tells such absurdities / as days and weeks...”; like a mass of well-worked dough

stretches to a translucent gauze and yet still pulls back to its center, it seemed like time might finally tear apart before it didn't. It had become possible in that new way of living, where idleness and (collective) action clashed so intensely, to see through the social construction to another way of being.

Why didn't the strands of time tear free between the spring lockdown and the summer uprising when it felt like anything, the end of work and time and the racial capitalism at their root, might happen? Instead, at the decisive moment, every element snapped back into place with the discipline well-practiced by responsible citizens of a police state—we survive, after all, by internalizing the thousand social constraints that apply to

us at any moment; just how far we can move, if at all, before force is applied to bring us into line.

The jobless, without collective aid from the ones who never lost work, were forced back to jobs that might kill them or any strangers they shed virus on. The tenants with nothing to fear paid their rent on time and ignored our pleas as always, and even those who had begun to organize withholding payment—there were many dozens, perhaps hundreds of us, who attempted organized rent strike actions in my city—moved out or made peace with the landlords. The white allies who marched in the first weeks after George Floyd’s murder stayed home, they haven’t been seen since.

What happened?

Was it exhaustion? Was it the promises of change being made by everyone invested in the upcoming presidential election that killed the revolution? Was it the failure of organizing that kept the different struggles taking place from joining together to strike collectively at our common enemy, the ruling classes of (mostly white) bosses and landlords and the genocidal structure through which they manage us? Was it self-interest and fear of retaliation felt by the professional and working classes? For the rest of us, was it the culture of collaboration with the ruling classes and the aspiration of making it to comfort someday? Was it the fantasy of inevitable progress, was it the absence of a memory of thousands of

years of class struggle? Did the pro-cop propaganda in the media really change the minds of people who came out for the movement in the early days or did they never support (never feel sufficient pressure to join) a restructuring of society that would make real the demand that BLACK LIVES MATTER?

Yes and yes and yes and—

2.

THIS IS AN ANCIENT STORY. If it was happening now, we'd recognize it and spring into action. We would look for a rupture. We would not believe that time will bring us anything different. We would learn there cannot be any progress under a system that welcomes a reactionary backlash to eliminate every reform and its radical potential. The way every coin flip calls for a settling of accounts; every election (any action within the official system) calls forth another to balance it out, so that the structure remains unchanged in the long run. Things would be different if the disaster were unfolding now, which it is.

3.

IT HAPPENS that there's such a thing as a Graywolf Press. A press like any other that publishes in Minneapolis. Year after year they publish their books. They believe in uplifting diverse and underrepresented voices; it's in their mission statement. I'm sure they think they're doing something.

But nowhere does Graywolf Press acknowledge the contradiction between publishing (as an above-ground, credentialed, grant-funded, state-sanctioned activity) and the survival of the diverse and underrepresented people it claims to support. This will condemn them.

It happens that the Target Corporation is also based in Minneapolis, and as part of

its commitment to the public Target grants a small portion of its profits to what it calls its community. Graywolf Press is part of that community and it has received what appears to be (there is a decided lack of documentation available) an amount in the hundreds of thousands of dollars from Target—a vast sum of money for a small publisher, which may be why every book I’ve ever seen from Graywolf Press has had a Target logo on its copyright page and a note thanking the corporation for its support.

Target also includes the police department of Minneapolis in its community. It spent \$300,000 purchasing surveillance cameras to “enhance” law enforcement efforts in downtown Minneapolis, part of a broader



partnership it maintains with the police. Target wanted to clean up the area and make it more appealing to (white) suburban consumers who would get to browse their shelves and linger in the book section where they can purchase titles from Graywolf 's diverse catalog. And the cops publicized how thankful they were for the assistance.

They're all part of the imagined community, you see. Target. Graywolf Press. The middle and upper class consumer. The police.

Who does not belong to the community? It's the people who were already transformed by the community's gaze into criminals without having done anything against the law (much less against any just

law), who were described by a subsequent Target report on the surveillance effort in these terms: “Panhandlers, people drinking alcohol on the street, and other ‘lifestyle offenders’ roamed the streets. Even though there was relatively little violent crime in the downtown area, people tended not to feel safe or comfortable there.” This community also excludes our comrades (poor people, Black people, young people of Minneapolis) who responded to the murder of George Floyd in May by burning down the 3rd Police District and looting an adjacent Target store that five months later is still being rebuilt.

In other words, the less palatable of diverse and underrepresented voices are incompatible with this community. The

vast majority of them, in fact. They belong out of sight, only as a memory of everything wrong and deficient, they belong in the holding cells and prisons of the community, and they belong there simply because they're not white, not voracious consumers, not exceptional people of color who are worth something to the community.

You can read about racism in the diverse books Graywolf publishes. Claudia Rankine, Graywolf darling, professor and poet par excellence, will tell you everything, except that Target partners with police departments to help them carry out these anti-crime campaigns across the country, through which crime and criminals are themselves invented (as well as class divisions, anti-Blackness,

race, and gender regenerated). At the same time, Target funds arts and civic organizations that must try to make sense of and repair that anti-Blackness, those class divisions, and on and on; but they can never come close to making any repair because the one thing they can't do with their funding is risk losing it by saying what's really going on here: that their sponsor is complicit with genocide and doing more to aid the oppressor than the oppressed.

What are we to do with the knowledge that Graywolf Press is not even one step removed from the Minneapolis Police Department and the continuous surveillance of downtown Minneapolis that is disproportionately destructive of Black life? What happens when even

Claudia Rankine, author of *Citizen* (“Part protest lyric, part art book... a dazzling expression of the painful double consciousness of black life in America,” says the Washington Post) has her advance paid by the same entity which is a partner to the police, which was able to support the police because it runs its own private security detail, complete with plainclothes guards, and its own in-store surveillance systems?

To think that Graywolf Press and the names of such poets as Claudia Rankine, MacArthur Genius grant recipient, surely the best among us, may be trotted out by Target whenever its detractors raise alarm about the way it seeks to transform every downtown core inhabited by poor and working people of color into open-air

shopping centers, sanitized by police violence, a vision of a eugenicist ideal that's echoed by Target's stable of arts organizations which in their regular practice filter through pools of artists searching for geniuses to pluck from obscurity rather than provide to marginalized people in need who would, yes, make public art if the boot were to lift from their necks.

If the choice is between human life and safety for Target's community, there's no choice: end the community, abolish it. There's no choice but to abolish the police departments and arts organizations when their success requires (is) the destruction of vulnerable classes of people. To call for the abolition of Graywolf Press and its writers; for Claudia Rankine the Poet to

abolish herself by smashing her awards  
and retiring, so that every Black and  
brown woman gets to live. The abolition of  
every Press and every Poet.

4.

WHAT IS INTERESTING ISN'T THE FACTS, those are innumerable. They proliferate every day under racial capitalism; like needles to a magnet wherever they are they point to the contradictions between life anywhere and the health of this inhuman system.

What would be interesting is a new way of thinking that cuts through the cognitive scaffolding of fantasies and rationalizations that holds up the entire edifice.

For example, to point out the contradictions between human life and publishing in order to abolish the presses as well as the notions that animate publishing, which like the vines of the



extraterrestrial pods in *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1978) wrap around our living bodies to assimilate us into the inhuman project the second that writers stop to rest. And haven't the poets who accepted fellowships from institutions like the Poetry Foundation described the act of crossing over to enemy lines as one of desperation, even exhaustion? As that which they would have rather avoided but, like our horror protagonists, were tired of struggling and needed (or deserved, as they have argued) a break? They go to rest with an awareness that they've won a break at the expense of others who will never, even in death, be given that option.

5.

THIS IS A STORY ABOUT PUBLISHING, which is also the story of dispossession, imperialism, plunder, and mass murder. The cast of characters who will be implicated in these crimes are the following: the billionaire Mohn family, Bertelsmann, Penguin Random House, One World, and the 2021 novel *Detransition, Baby* by Torrey Peters.

THEN—

In 1942, Reinhard Mohn is 18 years old. Through a fortunate accident of marriage and death, his family has, in his early youth, come under possession of the Bertelsmann's publishing company. They

are rich. The war is at a turning point. The first decision Reinhard makes as an adult is to join the Luftwaffe and murder his fellow man.

His father Heinrich is a Christian man, but what moves his spirit must be something closer to a love of commerce (this will be supported by the events that follow), or perhaps, though this cannot be substantiated, cold ambition. Under Heinrich, Bertelsmann becomes a leading publisher for the Nazi regime. The company finds “early publishing success under the Nazis in the autumn of 1934 with... ‘the Christmas book for Hitler Youth’”. Bertelsmann prospers under the Nazis, with the Wehrmacht as their client; soon they are by far the largest publisher in Germany.

Success has a price. Heinrich, of course, is a financial supporter of the SS. We have no evidence that he objected on either moral or spiritual grounds. In contrast to the myths the Mohn family will invent after the war to wash the blood off their name, there is no evidence that they carried out any efforts to aid the resistance against the Nazis. In other words, they were loyal.

Their service, however, is not enough to save Bertelsmann from being brought back to discipline by the Nazi party when the company is caught illegally hoarding paper. It's not that Bertelsmann is completely forced to shutter its operations at this moment. No. They are merely chastised by the prohibition to publish any new texts and thereafter partially closed.

But their work, their production of propaganda for the military and anti-Semitic texts is essential to the regime and it will continue until the war against fascism reaches it, liberating the Jewish slaves that work its printing presses and finally forcing it to stop.

When the Nazis are defeated in 1945, young Reinhard is a prisoner of war. When he returns to Germany, he does not yet know that it will become, at least part of it, a capitalist West Germany. That under this capitalist Germany, many people who collaborated with the Nazis will never be held responsible. Rather, they will retain their positions of power. They will not be held accountable for the fortunes they made from the campaign of mass murder they helped carry out. Because his father

is ailing, and because of the old man's ties to the SS, which threaten to have the company seized by the occupying allied forces, Bertelsmann is handed over to Reinhard in 1947. He is 23 years old.

This is a challenging moment for collaborators with mass murder. Trials have been taking place. The Mohn family invents a story about how they were victims of Nazi repression. This fiction allows them to continue publishing. It allows the company to grow, along with the fortunes of the Mohn family who are made billionaires as Bertelsmann becomes one of the largest publishers in the world.

Reinhard Mohn runs the company until 1981. Because the lie is believed, or

because it must be believed no matter how incredible, Bertelsmann builds a pristine image as a responsible corporation: the 1985 historical record it commissions, on the occasion of its 150th anniversary, makes Heinrich out to have been a hero of the resistance. By this time, Bertelsmann has purchased two major American publishers, Bantam Books and Doubleday. In 1998, it purchases Random House.

It is only in 2002 that the truth comes out about Bertelsmann's past and the Mohn family's complicity with Nazi crimes—and only after freelance researcher Hersch Fischler exposes them in a magazine article that the company admits to its past.

Bertelsmann today is one of the largest

publishers in the world. The company is still directly owned by the Mohn family and by foundations created when Reinhard was alive. When the profits it extracts from the publishing houses it owns leave the hands of the workers and writers who generate them, those profits go into the coffers of the Mohn family and its foundations.



AND NOW—

The story of what ties Bertelsmann to the 2021 publication of Torrey Peter's *Detransition, Baby* will be a familiar one to those who have witnessed the consolidation of the publishing industry over the past few decades and the ways it continues to fail marginalized readers, writers, and editors as an enthusiastic partner in capitalist, white supremacist, settler colonialism.

When we open the novel, we find that *Detransition, Baby* was published by One World. But which One World is that?

The One World to which we're referring today is an imprint of Penguin Random House—it was launched in 2017 as a smaller in-house press with diverse,

progressive branding under the broader umbrella of the corporate behemoth known as Penguin Random House. This, however, is not the One World (also an imprint of Random House) that was founded by pioneering Black editor Cheryl Woodruff in 2000 with a vision of corporate-backed multiculturalism. Nor are we talking about the One World that was created in 1992 as an imprint of Ballantine Books (another large publisher owned by Random House) as a Black press and explicitly as part of a short-lived corporate publishing trend towards acknowledging (cashing in on) the existence of Black readers in the early nineties.

Listen to the way Peters credulously describes this state of affairs in an

interview: “One thing that happened was there were people inside the publishing industry who understood what I was doing and were willing to execute it. Something interesting is that that was a little bit an anomaly, that I happened to find those people. One World, Chris Jackson took over One World and their mission is to publish diverse voices, and Chris Jackson has a philosophy that, ‘Actually, diversity is mainstream America.’”

Chris Jackson himself (via NPR) has called One World’s story "part of a cautionary tale about the publishing industry’s attempts to diversify.” Jackson might "understand" but does that change anything?

*Bones*, the first book he published when

took over *One World* after its 2017 relaunch was a “true life tale” (*NY Times*) by a white journalist that follows an FBI investigation of cartel activity on the US–Mexico border—more bloody meat approved by the Justice Department for white readers hungry for stories of Mexican crime festering in America but always safely out of sight. Like Jeanine Cummins’s *American Dirt*, its ideological counterpart which shares the same rotten ethical foundation that seeks to profit from narratives that stereotype Latinx people and associate their racialized identities with violence, a great deal of money is being spent to adapt *Bones* into a film.

“Racist systems require vessels,” says sociologist Lucius Couloute—these are the

scaffolding of structural racism, the institutional bodies whose policies and practices produce racially discriminatory outcomes. Studios that produce "cartel media" (César Albarrán-Torres) like *Sicario* and *Breaking Bad* are partners to publishers like One World; together they not only generate the racial anxieties needed to criminalize people of color through their publications and unequal hiring practices they also absolve themselves of guilt by wielding this discourse of diversity.

So this is another publishing story that relies on a central myth. Only now it's the fantasy that corporate publishers are capable of doing more good for marginalized writers and readers than the harm they actively cause.

Chris Jackson, again: “One of the things it [the creation of imprints for books by writers of color] did was sort of let the rest of the company off the hook from publishing those books, and thinking about those books... And it made those things disposable. So that if it wasn’t working, the imprint’s gone, and with it goes every black writer you might have on your list.”

How is it possible that large publishers keep committing to publishing Black writers and others who have been historically denied equal access to jobs and publication and then just letting the imprints they created to turn things around fall to pieces? How is it that the publishing industry has spent decades breathlessly concerned about the racial

discrimination that takes place within its offices and promising to reform itself while remaining today fundamentally unchanged: still presenting a hostile work environment to people of color, still composed of disproportionately white management and editorial staffs, still spending fortunes on racist books, still closed off to writers of color who don't conform to its reactionary culture and politics?

Here we have a contradiction that cannot be resolved: corporate publishing is guided by a white supremacist, capitalist ideology under which people of color must be kept in a state of unfreedom, and yet it must hold out the promise of reform (in speaking of a diversity that cannot and will never enter its gates) in

order to extract the maximum amount of profits—there is an awareness that if people of color cannot be convinced that progress is possible under this system, that they may revolt and tear it down. That's how we've arrived at this state of affairs where the multicultural or diverse imprint is both so necessary to corporate publishers that they continue committing and recommitting to them and, at the same time, they are totally disposable, as Jackson admits.

Chris Jackson, as an individual, can believe he's doing the right thing, just like Torrey Peters. But Jackson as an editor for Penguin Random House is a technician for an oppressive system, and he is forced to oscillate between its reformist and brutalizing undercurrents. On some level,



he understands the brutality of this system but because it rewards him handsomely he must continue to operate within the strict boundaries of its murderous ideology.

That's how he was able to simultaneously serve as editor for a memoir by former Attorney General Eric Holder (a war criminal who crafted the legal justification for Obama's use of torture and drone strikes) and a book by the parents of Trayvon Martin. And it's how he can dream of publishing the Obamas he holds in high esteem as well as the marginalized people he identifies with that they put into body bags. According to documents obtained by *The Intercept*, both Holder and Obama sat in meetings where they approved each drone strike

target and, implicitly, the murder of civilians.

We can see the same thing happen to Peters when she identifies with the editors whose technical expertise is applied every day to make this engine for inequality function. If she were to acknowledge these contradictions it would destroy her career. But as long as Peters believes their unbelievable lies, this horror show can continue: she can have a more comfortable life than almost every single trans women of color and her bosses can keep telling trans people not to worry because things are getting better: *Look, here's a trans book.*

For publishers, which exist to extract profits and exert control, this is an

everyday fraud. It's only a few years before they reanimate the corpses of their own forgotten imprints and recommit themselves to another empty dream like multiculturalism or diversity, which has everything to do with capturing the energies of young writers who would otherwise, like the proletarian literature movement of the Depression era and the Black writers of 90s "street literature", commit themselves to self-publishing for a community that has been deprived, and has nothing to do with the liberation of oppressed people. At the same time, Penguin Random House will never stop publishing and legitimizing war criminals with names like George Bush, Barack Obama, and Donald Trump whose best-selling books bring in profits and power

its internal structure demands.

Bertelsmann owns Random House. Random House owns One World. One World owns a diverse catalog of books. All of them belong to the same world, which is the world of publishing, where Nazis sit comfortably alongside their capitalist enablers, their American imperialist friends, and the marginalized writers who should know better. Because every fortune is the product of terror. And every author that was ever published, was published in the same motion that another, less fortunate, was dispossessed.

As the axe that splits the skull to the trail of blood that writes itself on the opposite wall.

## THOUGH, FRANKLY

It's hard to tell them apart. After all, what makes a writer who published a novel with Bertelsmann while it was under contract with the Nazis different from a writer who publishes a novel now with a company that publishes war criminals on the next floor? Hell, what does it mean to put a book for sale on Amazon when it's getting paid billions of dollars to provide cloud services to the CIA? Writers need to eat, they need time away from shitty jobs to carry out the writing that's inside their hearts. I can understand that. But there are limits. There have to be ethical limits or revolution will be held back by the forces of counter-revolution, of which

publishing and mass media form an important part, until there is nothing left.

It's too late to argue about how far a person has to reside from the life-giving heart of the imperial war machine to be absolved of guilt, of a responsibility to act. If a person can get close enough to the professionals that make propaganda for empire to lay a hand on them, they're too close—they become implicated by the failure to defenestrate the accomplices. Part of an infrastructure of terror that invites violence to visit its own doors.

I have written this with all the restraint I can summon. A corporate literature of the oppressed is a sign of liberation moving out of reach.

6.

THE AUTHOR IS A PRODUCER, as Walter Benjamin reminds us: 'Instead of asking, "What is the attitude of a work to the relations of production of its time? Does it accept them, is it reactionary? Or does it aim at overthrowing them, is it revolutionary?" -instead of this question, or at any rate before it, I would like to propose another. Rather than asking, "What is the attitude of a work to the relations of production of its time? "I would like to ask, "What is its position in them?" This question directly concerns the function the work has within the literary relations of production of its time. It is concerned, in other words, directly with the literary technique of works.'

It's not just a question of content, as he writes, although there's something to be said about the ways that certain aesthetics or modes with apparent revolutionary potential have been suppressed by literary institutions—political poetry, poetry with a social commitment, for example, has since the Harlem Renaissance and the workers movement of the early 20th century been maligned for its supposed lack of literary quality while literariness itself remained an unexamined, fraught concept that's resulted in a contemporary poetry utterly hostile to the social, the very reader who has returned the favor by abandoning it—while others deployed with reactionary aims have been elevated to official status, as a result of which they could receive funding from nonprofits and



government agencies. (See: The Cultural Cold War)

What he's getting at with discussing the work of Soviet writers and collectively-run newspapers directly after the quote is the practical matter of *how* texts are produced and distributed. Here he highlights the difference between Soviet papers which at that moment were allowing ordinary workers to write from their own experiences to their fellow workers, as opposed to newspapers in Western Europe where explicitly revolutionary writings by leftist elites were isolated, assimilated, and turned into entertainment by the bourgeoisie.

But Benjamin wasn't a militant. He wasn't connected to the struggle against

fascism in the streets in a way that would have made clear the role of literary production in revolutionary struggle. While Benjamin wasn't an academic, his work was published and funded in part by the Institute for Social Research at the University of Frankfurt. He wasn't a designer of books, he wasn't a publisher or printer; Benjamin wasn't even a working writer for much of his life. For a long time, he lived on money from his upper middle class family.

However, this is the question that is clearest to me as a writer-printer: it's that just as Benjamin demands of us elsewhere that we "brush history against the grain" so should we also brush every aspect of publishing against the grain. Doing so means not only critiquing via the written

word, it requires us to establish alternate, collective forms of printing and digitally reproducing our texts *as part of the broader struggle*, taking none of this for granted.

And, especially today, moving as writers with an awareness that the same printers and designers that can create copies of our poems can work with us to make flyers in remembrance of the victims of anti-Black violence, publicize an action against the latest act of state terror, publish pamphlets that carry testimony and demands by people in our communities, share public health information to keep us safe, or help neighbors organize mutual aid during a time when we can't meet face to face. Working against, in contravention, of the

pristine community and its law. Which is exactly what the existing presses can't do.

During the summer of 2020, the Black Philly Radical Collective issued 13 demands to "abolish... the structures of policing and related state violence." These demands were in themselves a monumental event, signaling an opening of possibilities for Black liberation after weeks of sustained Black Lives Matter protests—but as far as I know the demands were never published in full by the press. I haven't found any sign that they were ever printed and distributed on paper or expanded on outside of recorded events held by the Collective. In fact, I remember that when the demands were first issued, they were posted to Facebook in such a way that the reader was faced

with a wall of text, difficult to read without zooming in on the page.

This is exactly where writers, designers, and printers were needed—posters of the demands should have been plastered in every neighborhood; artwork should have been made in the community to visually convey the ideas in the text back to the older generations we already know are distrustful of abstract concepts like abolition and defunding the police; pamphlets with testimony about how each of the 13 demands would improve people's lives could have been left in every mailbox. And an equal effort could have been made by the same cultural workers to translate those popularizations of the original demand document into digital media suited for the internet.

Maybe none of this would have been enough to keep the movement alive past the summer. But I don't think it's a coincidence that many of the efforts that came and went in that spring and summer of revolution (and I am speaking as a participant rather than as an observer), lacked the same element of effective mass communications. A nearly identical issue took place when the first local encampment of houseless activists and outside organizers issued its own founding document and demands—this was also a block of text filled with dense language that needed more context and a visual component to be understood by people who hadn't been in those meetings. Again, disconnected efforts were made to address their communications, but there

was never a central media strategy carried out by a dedicated group of people with art, writing, printing, and design skills working in partnership with the houseless residents who were the heart of the encampments to make their message heard.

Ultimately, the demands for Black liberation and the encampments' demands for housing justice were both crushed by the city's media apparatus, which overwhelmingly presented the public with racist, pro-cop propaganda. No wonder our neighbors were suspicious of the modest demand to cut police spending and instead fund social programs when the news kept framing the activists as irrationally violent and interviewing cops that called defunding

dangerous. And, of course, the communities where the encampments were set up grew more and more angry as the press ran with the city government's narrative that the encampments caused crime when it was the city's own corruption and negligence that forced poor people into desperate situations like living outdoors with no chance of accessing public housing. Nearly two years later, policing and housing in our city remain fundamentally unchanged—they are still primary means by which the city and its partners in the business and nonprofit sectors extract wealth from and repress vulnerable communities.

It might be better to ask, how could the revolution have succeeded when facing a one-sided war of words?



**2.**

**Radical  
Scabs,  
Radical  
Snitches**

The first question I had when I saw the call for submissions for *We Want It All* was, “Where are they getting the money for it?”

Much like this collection of radical trans poses and gestures, my question was a coin with two divided faces. First, I confronted the one that was most obvious to me as a trans writer who has been a food stamps recipient for years: “How will poor trans writers be able to submit work to this seemingly well-funded press if they won’t receive any payment in return?” Because Nightboat Books wasn’t planning

to pay its contributors. Or, put another way, how are trans writers supposed to exist and create any writing at all if the publications asking for our work refuse to pay?”

I put this question to the press and its editors in that early stage of the book’s publication, and after facing backlash along with other writers who had the same concern (being trans writers who could not afford the time to write and send in a submission without payment; who did not have access to the wealth or employment opportunities required to sustain a recreational writing practice), the press announced it would be paying a small honorarium to its writers. An honorarium that as of this fall, nearly two years on, as press for the book began to appear in such

notable literary institutions as *Publisher's Weekly* and *Poets & Writers*, had yet to be paid to them.

You might think, maybe there's nothing intentional about these missteps. Their hearts are in the right place. It's not as if the publisher and its editors, with their well-educated, employed writers in tow, operate under a banner that reads TRANS WORKS OVER TRANS LIVES.

Note how the introduction to the book calls our attention to the task of revolution. That's nice, but what is the relationship of this book to the means of production? As Walter Benjamin writes, "Political tendency alone is not enough." Because even a book that bills itself as "a collection of writing... against capital and

empire” can be swallowed up, neutralized, and set against workers by the institutions that form racial capitalism.

Indeed, publishing is a major arm of racial capitalism. Publishing nourishes and strengthens capital both through the production of propaganda which helps to justify imperialist wars and also where it intersects with the university and corporate finance to produce through the Author and the Book the neoliberal narratives of progress, merit, human worth, and genius which are essential to the opposite (but intimately connected) arms of policing and punishment. If the author (always white, always educated, deserving) has something to say, then the prisoner (always Black or brown, uneducated, undeserving) has nothing to

say.

Those broader dynamics operate in full force in *We Want It All*.

Back when I originally spoke up about being shut out of publishing as the kind of poor trans writer who couldn't afford to work for free—a poet who did end up being published in the collection reached out to me. Unprompted, she confessed to what seems to be at the core of the book: careerism, self-advancement, reformism, and revolutionary aesthetics wrapped around guilty white/liberal hearts. She wrote, regarding her decision to push ahead with submitting to *We Want It All* despite knowing that I and other poor writers were excluded: “i am just about to graduate with an mfa and feel like now is

the time for me to push for some institutional legitimation that i can use to lift up other ppl. i have access to the social capital of publishing now, and want to use it in such a way that i can lift other ppl up.”

I want to thank this poet for being honest. I didn't know what to say at the time, apart from the obvious: that there wasn't enough common ground for us to work together despite living within minutes of one another and knowing the same queers because we had profoundly different visions for mutual aid and publishing. While I was working for the abolition of publishing and the university so that I and other oppressed people could survive, she needed them to exist so that she could build a career, buy a house, have a nice queer life.

This goes back to my initial question: how can the writers of this book afford to write? It's because despite the editors telling us that "poetry should be an activity by and for everybody," with this book they recreated the hierarchies that determine who among us actually gets a chance to write poetry and publish. Literature professors. Graduate degree holders. People who have already published entire books. That's who made it into *We Want It All*.

There's almost no one in this book that doesn't have a graduate degree or hasn't already had a book published by a press—each is an incredibly rare feat for the most marginalized trans people, and yet many of the contributors of this book have accomplished both. They're professionals,



most of them; as in, they produce writing at their day jobs, or publishing in this book will pay off for them just as it will for the MFA grad who wrote to me. This will become another line in their resume, it might help them sell some books, so they don't need the cash payment really. I mean, Aaron El Sabrout, the poet whose work opens the book is a staff attorney at a nonprofit. I'm a sex worker who almost wound up without a place to live three separate times in the past two years. He writes, "Who does gender serve?" Maybe it's served him, if it's gotten him a job and a life. If he's able to write a weary tourist scene in Mexico for this collection where you can just about hear him sigh, "On the beach the wannabe Maya head / and the somewhere-maybe pyramid / are still

sand, sloughing into the sea.” Whereas I’m a Mexican for whom gender and empire make it impossible to return home—I can’t even afford to update my fucking passport.

We are not the same.

Is it so hard to say that a university professor who gets paid to write non-threatening texts by an institution that has its own police force to protect its property and its deserving people may not be capable of the same forms of revolutionary analysis that arise at the intersections of racialization, sex work, poverty, and disability? Most of the poets in the collection are white, by the way, and they struggle mightily to engage with the specter of white supremacy that haunts

them at every turn—consider the way Aeon Ginsberg disappears the movements of Black and brown people with a breezy statement like, “The way things are going, the queers are going to be the last haven against the police state...” (excuse me?) and flattens queer experiences into a platform they hop on to speak for racialized migrants and refugees: “There’s a customs bench on every border making ghosts of our bodies.”

*Our* bodies? We are not the same!

No poet confesses to having rich parents or a cushy job or to benefiting immeasurably from their whiteness in their author bio, but it’s obvious that there are class differences between the people who made it into this book and those of us

who were excluded. These differences remain unspoken in the collection just like they do in every other product of institutional publishing.

Speaking of the devil, let's turn to the second question: where is the press getting the money to publish this book? It's no small thing, after all, producing a print run of a 450 page book, even if you aren't paying your writers. There are editors to be paid. A designer. Maybe a publicist. Someone has to make sure that review copies go out to the right people, that this tome ends up on bookstore shelves... somewhere, during a pandemic.

It turns out Nightboat Books received thousands of dollars in funding from Amazon through its Literary Partnership

in 2020. The exact amount isn't clear (there's no transparency), and the extent of the contributions Nightboat has received from Amazon and other corporate funders isn't known either. Nightboat's website gives thanks to the arts agencies of NYC and NY State, the NEA, some rich writer, and a private equity firm for their financial support, but that's the extent of their disclosures. What we do know is that Nightboat's books receive distribution through Small Press Distribution (SPD), which also receives funds from the Amazon Literary Partnership. And it's safe to assume that *We Want It All* will be nominated for at least one award from Lambda Literary (it may even win, like Nightboat's collection of Lou Sullivan's diaries did this year).

Lambda itself, as you may have guessed, has an extensive history of receiving funding from Amazon.

We also know the authors of *We Want It All* arrived to the collection through the depth of their involvement in the university and by publishing in presses and literary journals. They needed a certain amount of “institutional legitimation” before they could find their way into the book on their way to further legitimacy—and first had to form themselves as that, as Trans Writers, in institutions that receive funding from Amazon as well. Red Hen Press. Coffee House Press. Cave Canem. Kundiman. Electric Literature. The Kenyon Review. The Academy of American Poets. Again, Lambda Literary. And so on. Their author

bios are full of this stuff.

It's an interesting juxtaposition for *We Want it All* to be released at the same moment that workers from across Amazon's global labor force are taking risks to demand better working conditions. I'm not only referring to the international strike and protest action on November 27, 2020, which is an intensification of the yearly boycotts and protests that have taken place on "Black Friday" in recent years. There have been protests and calls to boycott Amazon throughout the Covid-19 pandemic, including in June (over the lack of PPE and the risk of illness "essential" warehouse workers faced) and in October (over Amazon's pandemic profiteering at the expense of its overworked and underpaid

labor). There was also a call for artists to cut ties with and for consumers to boycott Amazon in 2019 over news of the ways Amazon/AWS supports the Department of Homeland Security's race-based arrests, internment, and deportation operations. Not to mention the pressure Amazon has faced for taking massive contracts to provide cloud services to the CIA.

I'm not arguing that *We Want It All* made its poets into scabs, that it walked them across the picket line, and made them the enemies of working and marginalized people. They were already scabs. Publishing made them into scabs. Radical scabs with the proper political tendency who willingly got swallowed up by a brutal, interconnected system of racial capitalism that includes (as Andrea Abi-Karam



helpfully points out with these lines about a cop, “I STILL REMEMBER YR FACE. WHITE AND PINK AND SOFT W GREY HAIR. U COULD BE MY POETRY PROFESSOR) the poetry professor and the police officer as nearly indistinguishable colleagues. The professor (every professor) hands out credentials according to race and class and ability; and the cop hands out trauma and confinement along the inverse of the same lines. They work on the same campus. They subscribe to them same genocidal, reformist ideology. And, finally, the school where they work is often a financial donor of the city’s police foundation or union.

How could these writers not have known what they were getting into? There is no way to publish without becoming

enmeshed in this system and becoming a scab. Look at the radicals of this book: many of them are scabs several times over, they keep working for presses and journals that take money from Amazon to write books that make no impact on the lives of the workers whose bodies are being broken in the warehouses and delivery trucks. All the while the movements against capital, against the entirety of the settler colony continue to race past these poets who publish and read one another without reaching anyone else.

And I know. I'm aware of the cognitive games through which poets of the institutions absolve themselves of the call for divestment and revolutionary action by saying that it's working, actually, that they

can get the better of the capitalists in the devil's bargain they've struck. That somehow they will take the money with one hand and make revolution with the other. A feat that has never been accomplished.

What I see happening here. What the collection's own writers have said to me in private and what an analysis of the production of this book shows is that it has nothing to do with a revolutionary practice. It's about getting ahead in the miserable system they can't imagine turning against as combatants.

*We Want It All* is only available in print. It costs something like \$30 to get a copy into your hands. I humiliated myself by begging the press for a free copy, so I've

attached the PDF to my website to spare any other poor queers the trouble. I sincerely hope Nightboat will post a free copy to their own website someday.

A third question—one final, surprise “Where are they getting the money for it?”—might also be asked of the prospective readers of this book. Who is going to pay for this shit apart from other literary professionals or other over-educated scabs and their friends? A book of radical puppetry might be of use to people working to overthrow the institutions of racial capitalism from below if they could get access to it. I’ll concede that it may be possible this text could’ve helped someone, if only everything had been different about it. But the way this thing was made, the cost, the

disdain towards poor trans readers and writers, the size of the book, the contest for legitimacy within its pages, the over-inclusion of white poets who live in a world without people of color, makes it damn near impossible for *We Want it All* to receive the genuine engagement (the contact with action) that could only take place outside the walls of their workplace.

Perhaps Aeon Ginsberg leaves us with another mode of inquiry by asking us to consider, “It could take a parasite to destroy a beast. It could take a parasite to become a snitch too.”

Which suggests a theory of radical snitchery. A guild of radical trans snitches embedded in the institutions. Snitches who though they betray us every day by

speaking about us to the crushing machinery called publishing or the university or nonprofits (in an act of revealing “the map”, to borrow Ginsberg’s language) might be able to do something the rest of us can’t. The rest of us have never had the option of inhabiting the institutions like they do, but snitches get to walk in through the front door. Instead of making books, they could sabotage the infrastructure of the university, throw their bodies into the gears of the machinery of nonprofits by exposing their dirtiest secrets in a coordinated action, give us entry to their bosses’ properties or set a fire the next time they’re allowed into campus administration or the headquarters or formal functions where they get to shake hands with board

members.

I'll believe it when I see it.

# **3. Mutual Aid Printing and the Pandemic**



1. There's nowhere to go, is there?

2. We didn't create spaces where we could read, write, and work together before the pandemic hit. We didn't put journals and small presses through the radical transformation needed to make them cease being partners to white supremacist capital. Where can the jobless writer get paid for their poems, stories, or essays? Hardly anywhere. Not anyplace that doesn't launder corporate or state money or collaborate with organizations that do. I can't think of a single place to

send my writing or recommend to friends. The leftist journals that should be our comrades are their own nightmare.

3. The old world of publishing, with its corporate publishing houses, literary agents, middleman distributors, and bookstores, reveals itself to be more putrid and hostile to working people with each passing day of the pandemic. The antagonism on the part of writers and the consumers of books towards: the retail worker laid off without benefits and pay or forced to risk illness to get a paycheck from the bookshop; the warehouse worker who must risk their health to pack the books; and the postal worker and delivery driver who must also risk everything to make the books arrive within days of the order. Books have always been a

murderous business, and it is only more apparent now with literary bosses having attained the state-sanctioned power to murder their workers and with the writers and consumers of books at a cold distance where this violence is more obscured than ever.

4. But the newer face of online publishing is just as deadly.

5. There's what? Instagram, twitter, and facebook—that's what passes for distribution networks now. That's how jobs and money and other forms of material support are handed out among literary people who think they're doing something different from traditional publishing. But it's all built on the same old hierarchies of race, gender, class, and

dis/ability; they've been lifted from the streets and walls that literally segregate us and simply grafted onto these virtual spaces to bring them to order. The editors who have work assignments (money) to give can't see the masses of Black and brown writers who need it any more easily online than in the real world where they fear and avoid us. There's a reason why the online leftist publishing scene is so white, why the only writers of color among them are ones who've received the proper institutional discipline and credentials to hold their hands.

6. I couldn't take it anymore—being on social media and seeing my work be consistently, almost willfully, misappropriated and misunderstood, made me feel crazy; and I was already out

of my mind with depression, anxiety, and trauma.

7. I couldn't accept the bargain. I made a definite break in May 2020, and only just made a tentative step back last month to raise the money my friends and I needed to escape being houseless during the pandemic. I'm about to drop out and delete my presence again.

8. There was the time when I was developing the concept of an anti-press, as a form of mutual aid (anti) publishing from below; an impossible act of creation by dispossessed people who nevertheless would manage to organize just as, being a sex-working trans woman of color, I knew others like me had practiced before. I wrote about it over a period of months;

and all that time the writers (liberal in their actions, leftist by their aesthetic choices) who read my work and praised it began to use my language. They took up the notion of the anti-press and applied it to their new projects, which mirrored the old presses in their tendency to publish the same people as always: those that were educated, that were already published; that looked just like them. Gone was the imperative of reaching the comrade writers torn from us by incarceration, poverty, and other structural violences which runs through my critical essays. The first problem was that they were academics; they could imagine nothing outside the academy, no collective challenge to the university. Realizing that they had reproduced the horrors of

publishing, these same leftists declared the anti-press a failure—they'd missed the point completely. Of course, it was a failure. But even in the right hands, the anti-press was always going to falter and be reborn like the vision of abolition that animates it. Unlike an academic exercise, though, an attempt at collective care that fails still generates something for the people; every dollar, every resource transferred from those with more to those in need staves off deaths that had been planned for the oppressed. A failure of abolition also generates new myths of and for resistance—mass escape attempts, even those with martyrs, point to possible futures we could not have imagined otherwise.

9. When I was a kid, and we had come

over the border for the last time, we lived within view of the Rio Grande. My father was far away in the midwest, working in white men's factories alongside other immigrants. My mom worked too, but it wasn't enough. My grandmother, aunt, cousins, my siblings, mom, and I shared a two bedroom apartment. We had nothing. So my mom and my aunt baked traditional Mexican cakes in that cramped kitchen to make extra cash while the kids screamed and fought and watched them. They sold the cakes in the neighborhood, I think, and probably not for much since so many others lived on WIC and food stamps. It was an on-and off gig that helped them get by. The border region of South Texas has an unemployment rate that's twice the state average. It's been that way for



generations, a permanent condition of scarcity and precarity imposed on the people that keeps power in the bosses' hands and guts any attempts at organized resistance. My parents wouldn't put it in these terms, they'd call leaving their hometowns a choice, a search for opportunity—but I say they were dragged north to settle in Texas by the same white hand of exploitation that first dragged them to seasonal farm work in Michigan and meat packing plants in South Dakota, and then sent me to Nebraska on a “Hispanic” scholarship meant to diversify the campus with my brown skin. The hand of neoliberal economics & American imperialism that had intervened in the Mexican Revolution, guided its institutionalization into a repressive one—

party state subservient to the USA, and gutted its economy with forced deregulation, privatization of state-owned industries, and other legal means of dispossession. Still, necessity inspires our people to evade the law—raising money in ways the state never learns about, remembering other ways of relating to one another than the brutal competition the capitalist economy tries to press us into, ways of cooperating and sharing the little we have so that as few of us as possible are delivered to the punishment prepared for them by an administrator at a nonprofit, state agency, investment fund, or corporate office. But even at a young age, I was aware that sex workers on the street were beyond kinship for women like my mother and aunt who,

like many others we struggled alongside of, already dreamed of finding a place of comfort by embracing the enemy in one way or another. Many children of my mom's immigrant generation have done so by going to work for the border patrol. There are others who understand it is our task to secure the revenge against America our parents began when they came here to escape the neoliberal economic warfare Mexico faced in the 80's and 90's—total abolition.

10. The Booklet Series was an escape attempt at small scale. It approached the concept of the anti-press without ever reaching that zenith. In its final months, with the help of comrades, we were able to send free copies of the series to incarcerated people but the potential of

mutual exchange was never fulfilled. The pandemic began. Organizing to stay alive took priority. And, exhausted, seeing no path forward, I handed the work over to the collective at River Furnace. But we'd created something together that provided material assistance we each needed, while breaking with publishing by operating outside of recognition (having received no press, grants, or awards) and literally outside the law (in the informal economy). Most of the Booklet Series writers hadn't been published before; for nearly all of the two dozen writers this was the closest thing to a first book publication; many haven't been paid to write since. Compare that to Nightboat's recent *We Want It All: An Anthology of Radical Trans Poetics*—a product typical of online leftist publishing

whose contributors overlapped with the scene that had tokenized me. The anthology's contributors had all published before, half had books out already; they've continued publishing this past year while Nightboat used a grant from Amazon to produce the anthology; and they'll surely keep building their careers with this new publication credit.

11. The Booklet Series didn't bring us closer to publishing. If it is remembered at all, it should be for gesturing towards printing as a form of mutual aid by helping trans fems pay our rent through the underground sale of zines.

12. The leftist writers that agreed with my critiques have moved on. With their new presses and journals they are closer

than ever to the capitalist mode of literary production. Grieveland and Woe Eroa have their roots in that scene which dreamed of a proletarian poetry but didn't heed the warnings that such a poetry, lacking as it did a critique of white supremacy and the university, was doomed to repeat the same schemes as traditional publishing. To borrow from their language, it's a grift. The highest example of which is the so-called Poets Union.

13. "How are poets gonna start a union when you're all scabs?" asked Isobel Bess.

14. She's right. To participate in publishing is necessarily to become a scab for one corporate monster or another. In the case of Poets Union, a glance at the list of members on their page reveals that

many of them, at least a third, have worked for journals, presses, or schools that took money directly from the Amazon Literary Partnership. If we were also to count those who have collaborated with or worked under other poets who took money from Amazon that would be the majority of their members. And if we were to ask how many members have taken money from publishers or schools that got funding in exchange for polishing (let's say, with their very tongues, as with the proverbial bootlicker) the public image of any nonprofits, corporate backers, or the state itself—that would make nearly every last person in the union a scab.

15. That's not to blame the poets. Many I'm sure had no idea they'd been enlisted to work for Amazon, made to shout from

press releases and news articles that Amazon isn't that bad actually—in the words of a 2016 Lambda Literary statement quoted in the Seattle Gay Times, that you “share the Amazon Literary Partnership’s obsession with empowering writers to create, publish, learn, teach, experiment, and thrive.” Fucking Lambda, right? They’ve been literally working as a spokesperson for Amazon and queers are happy taking awards from them. On second thought, let’s blame the scab poets. Fuck the Lambda nominees too.

16. Look at the recent Poets Union statement of solidarity with Amazon workers attempting to unionize in Alabama—how dishonest it is of them to elide their collective and, in some cases,



ongoing complicity with Amazon's crimes against workers. What they should have done was admit the extent of their members' history of publishing in partnership with Amazon and analyze the supporting role of poets like them in the company's public relations strategy, reflecting especially on their role in this particular moment of Amazon's pandemic era union-busting, and then listed actions they are taking to make repairs and are planning to take to end all poets and writers' support for Amazon. Solidarity without action is like an apology without a change in behavior—useless.

17. It's interesting to think about what a union of poets who labor outside of publishing would be capable of without so many rotten linkages to capital. But for

precisely the reason that they (Poets backed by funding) are able to gather—the word organize would be too generous—we at the margins of the margins, forced to beg for cash one day and fight off our evictions and food stamp shut offs the next, are unable to.

18. It's no coincidence that when I asked R.M. Haines—apparent founder of Poets Union whose critique of publishing (one that refuses to engage with white supremacy) forms the group's ideological framework—if he could help me as a then houseless poet who didn't see a place for herself in the Union because it lacked a mutual aid component, he blocked me without responding. All because I had sent a mildly critical tweet with a link to my [gofundme](#). That's despite my work (along

with Isobel's) having influenced the Union's language and positions: the subheading "Against the prestige economy" echoes my *Essays Against Publishing*, as does the phrase "anticapitalist publishing", and the focus on the Poetry Foundation (a target of mine and Isobel's earlier writings and research). Haines' own essay "Poets Should Be Socialists" (a white careerist's gently anti-capitalist view on literary production & a foundational text for Poets Union) ambivalently cites a twitter thread by a poet who quotes me as an authoritative voice. But through the way these white poets communicate among one another and exclude (rob) others who are cast out, the influence of my work becomes invisible.

19. I'm making it out of the housing emergency I was in just weeks ago during that exchange. I pleaded for help and people who had used and misused my work sent me money. Enough to stay alive, but only for now. I'm too far behind on work now, too traumatized from worrying about being evicted for half a year then having to move on short notice and not having a house for a while. I'm sure it won't be my last eviction scare.

20. But most trans crowdfunding campaigns don't receive nearly the kind of money we were sent. Looking through #transcrowdfund, it seems like the average person gets a couple hundred dollars, even if the amount they need is in the thousands. A person with few followers, who doesn't have status or the

right person to vouch for them, gets only a small fraction of the funds they ask the public for.

21. The rules for raising funds are similar to those of publishing. Trans people are able to access life-saving support by leveraging their looks or their confessional, relatable, palatable creative work to make themselves into someone online. The trans people who get the most extensive support are the ones who least challenge the oppressive institutions that keep all of us down.

22. If they were to risk as much as their poorer, lesser known peers they might lose everything. So they don't. They choose to let others live with risk, allowing harm to reach them, while limiting their

own exposure.

23. Posting on social media with the right façade, like being published, transforms us from faceless nobodies who couldn't get a dollar sent to cover our unpaid rent into notable people whose worth is recognized and to be protected. (Every person has innate worth, but that of few is recognized by people with money to spend). This transfer of money makes us part of something, but not a community created through mutual acts of care—there's nothing reciprocal about idolizing or tokenizing people.

24. We've all seen that published trans writers, artists, and public speakers who end up having to raise money to meet various needs receive greater material aid

than other trans people who are in more dire situations. What is the process that sets them apart? What is its infrastructure, its connective tissue? We must study it well enough to infiltrate it and break open the bank vaults that stand between the masses of anonymous poor trans people (all marginalized people) and our collective survival.

25. Publishing doubles as a form of verification. An editor vouches for a writer in the act of giving space to their text in a publication—personally associating theirself with the writer. Editors & publications have the trust of the public for no good reason except that they have the education, money, time, and skills to give writers some of the prestige they've accrued in gathering the gifts of capital—

they have the resources to create works with the aura of official art.

26. In the language of Walter Benjamin, these editors with their graduate degrees and their funding from nonprofits and corporate sponsors are heirs to a vile tradition that has created art for the ruling classes at the expense of oppressed people's lives for centuries. Just as classical paintings in museums were said to have a unique value as the creations of academic-trained artists of the wealthy, while other cultural products (those of colonized and working people) were held in contempt, outlawed, destroyed. Editors now do the same: they uphold the power structure. We must understand, as Benjamin implores us, that the "cultural treasures" of the institutions—the



universities, the presses, the publishing houses—are the spoils of a class war. The victors of this war (the rich, the powerful, their soldiers and administrators) carry the treasures in a triumphal procession out of the hands of the people they rule over. It is no contradiction for the violence of publishing to have made such exquisite products as the books that adorn our houses and the shows that fill our screens.

27. Editors decide that one writer has something that another doesn't. One is a genius, the other is disposable. Curators for the oppressor, they've internalized the capitalist ideology in which scarcity and hierarchies are natural outcomes. This places a separation between writer and reader. A published writer is a person that has something the reader does not,

precisely because the reader will never get a chance to publish or even write.

28. The industry understands this perfectly. “Anyone can write a poem. To be a poet, though—to have your work read in an age not exactly teeming with famous verse stylists, Amanda Gorman aside—you have to submit. Every year, poets around the country submit their work for dozens of prizes and contests, hoping for a shot at prestige, visibility, maybe eventually an academic job offer.” (Dorany Pineda, *Los Angeles Times*)

29. “[The] state of being envied is what constitutes glamour,” says John Berger. The institutional poets who responded to our critiques of the Poetry Foundation by calling us jealous had a point, though we

refuse the scraps they've eagerly lined up for. Envy is the natural result of a system of racial capitalism in which inequality and deprivation are both planned and enforced. Of course, the houseless will want what the people with houses have.

30. "Art is a sign of affluence; it belongs to the good life; it is part of the furnishing which the world gives to the rich and beautiful. But a work of art also suggests a cultural authority, a form of dignity, even of wisdom, which is superior to any vulgar material interest; an oil painting belongs to the cultural heritage; it is a reminder of what it means to be a cultivated European." (Berger)

31. Power cloaks itself in art. It uses beauty to cover up atrocities. Amazon

donates millions to presses and journals, and at the same time it uses every dirty trick imaginable to break the unionizing efforts of the workers it forces to piss in bottles, shit in bags, and wreck their bodies. Berger tells us oil painting was a celebration of private property for the early capitalists. The capture of queer poets and poets of color within institutions is both a celebration of capital (that it can do anything, even turn the trauma of its victims and their cultures of resistance into commodities) and a form of accumulation itself. The poems may be useless bits of finery, but the exotic presence of the poets has a real market value.

32. A SONNET TITLED, THEY WILL  
CULTIVATE A FIELD OF SPLENDID

## FLOWERS AND CALL IT PUBLISHING

The capitalist production /  
of literature equals: /  
institutions consume writers, /  
the marginalized are a necessary /  
ingredient; this encounter /  
generates prestige, /  
the aura of cultural treasures /  
plundered by capital—the board rooms,  
/  
hedge funds, and state agencies which /  
require each a field of flowers /  
splendid and pungently /  
fragrant to hide their victim's bodies. /

savoring such rich earth, they grow tall:

/

even the horizon vanishes /

amidst a field of splendid flowers.

33. George Jackson: “Prestige stands between the masses and a revolt against their class enemy. The aura of magic, glamour, luster, and splendid permanence covers the fascists like a protective layer of fat.” Corporations can’t generate prestige on their own. Prestige is the legitimacy institutions gain when they (1) offer crumbs to the exceptional oppressed people they allow inside and (2) the oppressed smile rather than put a knife to their throat—it is of the utmost

importance that they accept the bargain with some expression of willingness, everyone must see that the system worked for them, even as it destroys their communities.

34. A common topic of discussion in West Philly this past year: why hasn't Penn burned to the ground? Maybe it's because the University of Pennsylvania is the largest employer in the city. It doesn't pay taxes, each year it owes the community millions more, and in robbing them makes the poor Black and brown youth of the city victims of a carceral education system. But it leaves enough crumbs on the floor to stop the riots from reaching its doors. Only for now, of course.

35. It's glamour that editors pass down

to the chosen few writers who get published.

36. Unknown trans people without publications, without a shrewd social media persona, without the right kind of history online end up on the wrong side of glamour; and beauty, glamour, the right aura of worthiness is a pre-requisite for accessing resources when anti-racist, non-hierarchical forms of mutual aid don't exist. This system benefits white trans people and punishes Black trans women, in particular.

37. It's more of the same white supremacist, capitalist system: we might have underground economies which sometimes aspire to mutual aid (mutual support that goes beyond charity and



builds meaningful partnerships and exchanges), that form and reform every few years in online spaces, but the overall flow of money still follows the same old hierarchies of race, class, gender, ability.

38. How many trans people with empty fundraisers and unmet requests for housing do we leave to die every year? I'm alive because I was sent money that other people weren't considered deserving of—the only way I can bear to live now is by working to dismantle the system that saved me.

39. I made my way through those online communities on just that: palatable looks and writings that weren't unsparing enough to not be taught in classes. I was so busy with surviving, with taking what I

could from these spaces, in spite of the increasing personal toll, that I wasn't able to build other ways of making and sharing my work—but there must be way to write and live without becoming a public figure and being divided from readers by glamour.

40. There has to be another way of finding each other; alternative spaces for making the encounters we desire. Books aren't the answer. As objects, they require so many resources to assemble (many of which, like the stable housing, graduate degrees, connections, and the access to specialized information that editors at any press possess, aren't apparent; they don't become visible to the reader apart from the respectable aura of book design aesthetics).

41. Books are formal encounters arranged by people that have nothing to do with us. It will help us to regard them as our enemies: their editors, their writers, their books.

42. For example, Carmen Maria Machado takes a writer-in-residence job at Penn. She publishes yet another award-winning book through Graywolf Press (Amazon Literary Grant recipient). She buys a house in West Philly with all that blood money. At the same time, the federal Justice Dept. spends months building a made up case against BLM activist Anthony Smith. He is arrested blocks from Machado's house in late October on false charges. The charges are not related to the protests happening at that moment in response to the police killing of Walter

Wallace Jr. (an event that also takes place blocks from Machado's house). Walter Wallace was a 27 year old father and an artist. The timing of Smith's arrest is clearly intended to intimidate protesters and suppress Black organizing in Philadelphia. As the police attack protesters who gather to demand justice for Walter, blocks away from Penn and Machado's house and Anthony's eventual arrest, they deploy weapons and equipment purchased with money donated by Penn. Anthony is free, for the moment, but he still faces charges as punishment for organizing for Black lives. Machado continues to build wealth in a landscape haunted by gentrification where only non-Black people are allowed to do so.

43. Publishing works by exclusion. A book isn't an exchange; it's the physical manifestation of hierarchies.

44. Now that there are no physical spaces where we can meet, the question arises: was there ever anyplace for us to be together? At the gay bar, in a parked car, on the warehouse dance floor, in the overcrowded apartments of friends, between the porch and the street corner in the shade where it feels good to linger, in those out of the way places detested and policed by people who call the cops. We never had much.

45. It's maddening having nowhere to go. Maddening having less than a room to yourself. Not even a porch or a fenced yard to call your own. Not being able to walk

down the street without fear of being looked at the wrong way, harassed, followed.

46. What it comes back to is there's no safety net. All I've gotten is a proliferation of gigs—the mere hope that I can get another a new gig to come online in time for another to reach its end or be cut off. I have six different sites where I make money and I just lost two others and I'm trying to get another two or three going at the moment. It's hell.

47. None of the sites are places where collaboration can take place; not an equal exchange. Especially not for sex workers who must assume they'll be kicked off at some point, suddenly lose income, be exposed to greater risks, and be denied

contact with the work friends and clients they've been engaging with there. That reminds me, I need to open up a notebook and write down a list of my friend's usernames on paper, just in case.

48. Did you know it's against the terms of service for a sex worker to make another twitter page after she's been deleted? Even if it was brought about by error or targeted harassment. Repeated violations of the terms of service can result in a permanent ban from the site. For many sex workers, social media sites are our workplace now. But we were talking about writing.

49. So it's not as if there was anywhere to go before. It was just less obvious when the readings and workshops existed, and

even writers like me who didn't go to those things, who already struggled to leave the house for anything before the pandemic, could pretend that we had options. We could still think that someday we'd be asked to read or to teach for a paycheck, if we worked hard enough first.

50. I've been trying to imagine online co-ops where we could sell our work and share the profits equally. Community printing and design workshops funded by small donations where our neighbors could make posters together or request copies of flyers at no cost. The kind of spaces that could be central nodes, meeting spots to bring different parts of the community together and help build our movements.



51. It was always a mistake to outsource the printing and distribution of our writing to third parties. It was a shitty thing to do to other workers before the pandemic—giving our money to bosses we knew would fuck over their workers just to get our books printed and delivered or sold in bookshops—but it’s an especially reckless way to proceed now that working conditions have become apocalyptic.

52. A lot of us are still playing that game; trying to get whatever benefit we can out of publishing, no matter who gets hurt along the way. That every press is satisfied with this state of affairs should tell you everything you need to know—most won’t even call for Small Press Distribution to fire its abusers and pay workers the wages it stole from them. Have any dared call for

SPD to be dismantled or for its ownership to be turned over to its warehouse workers? It's no surprise that SPD took grant money from Amazon before the pandemic, just like the presses that are helping it avoid accountability.

53. Until we're organized among ourselves and able to back up the workers who print and ship our physical texts, we must refuse to continue working as usual. If no longer publishing isn't an option, we can take printing and distribution into our hands to the fullest extent possible—building the capacity to collectively release writings and to aid the movements we're involved in, which are also in need of underground printing, design, and distribution.

54. The ideal form of mutual aid print distribution in this moment might be a network with independent cells.

55. For each cell to consist of a group of writers, editors, and artists working together in a particular neighborhood, city, or area. For each cell to be able to produce print (and digital) works and get them into the hands of local readers without the need for outside printing or shipping.

56. In practical terms: zines and chapbooks could be printed on ordinary home or office printers, as described in the DIY section of *Essays Against Publishing*, and bound by the members of the cell with a stapler. Poster and zine cover designs can be drawn on paper and

scanned or, my preferred technique, drawn onto dark cardstock as bold letters and figures, cut out with scissors, pasted onto a blank sheet to create high contrast, scanned, and then edited and printed. This form of printing is cheap and doesn't require much labor to produce large numbers of copies—the zines could be distributed on a free or pay-what-you-can basis.

57. Copies could be left at different locations in the city: given out at protests, left in free boxes, libraries, and coffee shops, dropped off at the houses of friends who could read and pass on the copies to other friends, or made available for pickup at certain porches or spots listed online. The back covers of the copies could inform readers that the copies are free but

that readers able to support can donate via the payment services listed (paypal, cashapp, venmo, etc).

58. Perhaps a cell could survive in isolation, but it's more likely to thrive as part of a network: a collective of cells with which it could collaborate, learn from, mutually support, and, crucially, share printing and distribution duties with. A cell in Philly might print and give out not just zines written locally, but also, by entering into agreement with an LA based cell, could print and distribute works produced by comrades in LA, who would do the same for those in Philly. In this way, reaching an advanced level of organization can eliminate the need to ship copies across the country.

59. The difficulty of coordination between cells would be a natural frictional force preventing a network from growing too large—it's hard to imagine any network comprising of more than a handful of cells or more than a few dozen writer-organizers. It's all the more reason for a diversity of overlapping networks to emerge: regional networks, networks of marginalized writers, networks of unemployed or low-income writers; that could each develop network-wide forms of printing and distribution specifically suited to their needs. A network could raise funds and disburse them through a central committee to support its cells and their writers. A network could function as a writers union and collect dues to fund projects decided on collectively. A

network could make a catalog of zines to be sent to incarcerated people (for example, through the comrades at Black and Pink, independent prison book distribution projects, and so on); educate its cells and writer-organizers on how to safely and effectively mail their work into prisons (sending incarcerated people radical texts in the wrong ways can make them a target for punishment by prison authorities), and eventually maintain a mailing list for ongoing support and collaboration with the comrades trapped inside prisons.

60. The fundamental thing is mutual aid: if this doesn't allow us to work together in ways that actually help us survive then it falters, no matter what work it produces. If there is to be such a

thing as mutual aid zine distro it has to result in money being paid to writers without demanding burdensome amounts of labor from them. This means unemployed and low income writers should be prioritized; not only that they should be the ones whose work is being printed and distributed, but that they should also be the ones leading these efforts and deciding how much labor to give them. It means printing old or previously published works, writing that's just sitting around and doesn't need anything except a book cover and laying out before it can be printed, and still paying poor people for that past work.

61. For poor writers with no other options, the risks are low. They don't have other sources of income. The government



isn't coming to save us; it wants marginalized writers and artists in this condition of misery. No arts grants will arrive at their door, not without exacting a terrible price from them or their community first.

62. At the same time, most of us know someone who has a printer. Old printers and scanners that can be put to use are constantly being thrown away, given out. We can buy 500 sheets of paper (enough to print 50 zines) for less than \$10, and enough printer toner to print 300 zines for \$30. The cost of printing a hundred zines in this way can be covered by selling a relatively small number of copies at a price that's fair to our communities. Again, the risks are low. That also means digital copies of our work can and should

be made available for free to the public.

63. There is a vast unmet need for affordable print work in our neighborhoods, especially now that bookstores and libraries are shuttered or facing reduced hours and, in many cases, are worth boycotting for the harm they're doing to their workers. We can do for ourselves everything we're supposed to rely on publishers and book sellers to do, and we can do it in ways that cause less harm to our communities, creating openings for revolutionary action to proceed.

64. Because mutual aid isn't enough. Surviving isn't the goal. What we're after is a complete undoing of the violent structures that rule our lives.

65. Joy James: “In a state of war you have the right to defend yourself ”

66. Walter Benjamin had the same idea. In his “Critique of Violence”, he reminds us that the state makes law through the use of force, and that it rejects the use of violence by anyone not affiliated with the state because of the tendency of those acts “by their mere existence” to threaten the law itself—violence as the practice of creating new relations between people, work, the land, and the state.

67. Any action we take that threatens racial capitalism by gesturing towards a rearrangement of society will be classed as violent by the state and repressed by its own (police & administrative) law-making violence whether or not any physical harm

is done by our actions. The state attributes violence as easily to “peaceful” demonstrations, the unofficial rescue/distribution of food, and spray painting slogans on public spaces as to the breaking of bank windows or the torching of cop cars. Why have the police shown up in large numbers to break up the most ordinary Black gatherings in West Philly parks? Why has the city of Philadelphia deployed "Mosquito" noise machines at over 30 parks with the aim of keeping predominantly Black youth from having access to public spaces in the evenings? This too is felt as an inherent threat to a social order that cannot tolerate Black joy, much less Black power. None of us can be peaceful when the law denies peace to Black people.

68. All threats to the power structure are violent. Therefore, nonviolent action is by definition an ineffective form of struggle.

69. The only hope for the poet is to embrace violent revolutionary action. One form of which is to join the struggle in the streets by carrying out printing, design, organizing, flyering, teaching, etc. in support of movements and groups with revolutionary aims. Note that these limited actions already require poets to break the law, which considers incitement to riot, rioting, and displays in celebration of riots (as in graffiti) to be crimes. But these actions are particularly important for poets who are entangled with the institutions in and around the university to take up—so long as they stand with the enemy, they will be in the crosshairs of

attacks by our movements—their ideological positions will be revealed as fraudulent, one by one their jobs will disappear with the abolition of the foundations, presses, and universities. These initial acts of violence will prepare us to take stronger actions.

70. From a meeting the other night when we were planning a mutual aid action and discussing the possibility of surveillance and intimidation by police at the location: “At least you know you’re on the right track when the cops are paying attention to what you’re doing.”

71. The search is for violent actions we are capable of carrying out and sustaining. A “pure divine violence” that rejects power and “does not stop short of annihilation.”

(Benjamin)

72. Based on the understanding of violence as effective action, we will no longer be surprised by the resulting repression of those actions by the state—the crowd solemnly stopping traffic will not be shocked by the deployment of riot police against them but rather prepared—for example, police capacity for repression can be drastically reduced by staging staggered or simultaneous actions (violence) across the city, forcing the police to divide their numbers.

73. The immediate task of changing the meaning of violence against the oppressor. First, within our own hearts, so that we can learn to celebrate revolutionary violence without believing

the lie that it is wrong, that it brings more harm than good, that it is anything but necessary. The killing of cops is not a moral breach but rather appropriate action in the face of oppression: at the same time that the verdict was being read at Derek Chauvin's trial (he's the pig that murdered George Floyd), a sixteen year old Black girl in Ohio named Ma'Khia Bryant was shot and killed by the police. Accountability is not possible under racial capitalism. But the revenge of eliminating police officers one by one, in pairs, or precincts? That is within reach.

74. To confront poets that collaborate with the institutions with demands for transparency and accountability. We are not the aggressors in such situations—and no matter how gently or forcefully we call



for a stop to their harm and for repair, we will not be wrong. Poor trans people should be able to ask published trans people, the grant and fellowship recipients in particular, for money and help with raising funds without feeling any sort of shame about it.

75. If a writer has an agent, that's an invitation for us to tell them to empty their pockets. If a writer publishes with a large publisher or their imprints, steal their book. Break into their car. Find them on the street and pry the iPhone out of their hand.

76. Last summer in West Philly, when the kids went around smashing shop windows and taking back what they were owed, they were able to identify precisely which

businesses were owned by gentrifiers and which were not their enemy. There were Black-owned businesses that never had to board up their windows or put up a sign stating their political position; everyone knew they should go untouched. It felt like Christmas morning after a particularly busy evening of smashing, as I walked with a friend through the neighborhood and saw which places got hit. A moment of pure joy. A promise of what awaits institutions like Penn.

77. The day is approaching when those of us who have begged for help will stop asking. We will make it so that no one dies of deprivation while others live in comfort, even if we have to burn it all down.

**+ A Few  
Addendum  
Items**

## **A note about the radical bookstore**

(Blog post)

I don't think I mentioned it here before but I went through the application process and managed to get copies of *Essays Against Publishing* into the zine section of the Bluestockings bookstore in New York. They're worker-owned now, and they have all the right political positions for a left leaning business. But they're still a business, and as such its priority is

sustaining itself and not the marginalized people whom it claims, who may not claim it back. Which is how I feel after getting to know the radical bookstore.

Any bookstore is always going to be in conflict with marginalized people. The radical bookstore with an impeccable analysis and diverse staff that struggle along every axis is no different because there is still a gulf that exists between the masses of the marginalized (any group) and the interlocking publishing/academic/financial institutions that it relies on to produce the books and sales its business model is based on.

This isn't a call out post or a confession, that would be absurd. I may cease trying to move them and give up the fantasy, which

every writer has, of having my work available in bookstores, but I don't condemn anyone who needs the money more than they need a coherent practice and alignment with people who are worse off than them. What I want is to take note of the failure of the radical bookstore to meet oppressed people where they are, and to suggest that abolition calls for a deeper transformation that would turn places like Bluestockings from mouthpieces for institutional publishing into the accomplices that oppressed people require for the creation of revolutionary culture.

In short, I assumed incorrectly that this bookstore could be different. If you're reading this, you probably know I've spent years documenting the struggles of Black

and Latinx trans women in particular with respect to book publishing. It is clear that a business that prioritizes the acquisition and sale of books will put these vulnerable writers (as well as many other groups) at a disadvantage. Poor and working trans people of color are in a state of emergency that almost exceeds understanding—we do not have access to publishing, and when we do produce written works, they tend to be unmanageable ones that are beyond recognition and may even disappear instantly. A handful of white trans women have had the doors to corporate publishing opened for them after years of self-publishing their own work, which at first may have appeared to be as unrecognizable as ours, but it is revealing that these book deals have not

materialized for any of the trans women of color who have done work that far outstrips writers like Torrey Peters and Jeanne Thornton.

So if a bookstore insists on stocking trans books while neglecting the rich body of trans zines (and ebook releases which could with minimal expense be put into print form) that's at great risk of being lost then it will necessarily stock a disproportionate amount of work by white, economically comfortable, and politically harmless writers. This is what has happened to Bluestockings, along with every other bookstore and every library.

A turn away from the published book—works that have been produced by such enemies of the people as MFA programs,



by racist presses, by corporate publishers—and towards zines and other works produced by communities of writers themselves offers an alternative future where the masses can use the radical bookstore or library to organize and speak back to themselves. Too often the books we find at these places present a friendly face, a veneer of diversity, when their production has taken place through great harm to our communities. But even the radical bookstore refuses to resist the dominant mode of production by making the kinds of interventions that we need. I shouldn't have been surprised that the suggestions I made for creating space for trans writers of color at Bluestockings were met with reticence.

But it would take an embarrassingly

small effort to make a drastic difference. Considering that Bluestockings (again, this is not to single them out but to point out how even the supposed best of these establishments fails us) does not appear to have books by Venus Selenite, Dane Figueroa Edidi, b.binaohan, or Luna Merbruja in stock—foundational authors whose influence is incalculable, even as they were forced to self-publish their works while facing a severe lack of resources.

If, as I suggested, the bookstore had moved to stock back issues/reprints of the booklet series; if they had created more flexible ways for marginalized trans writers (I'm thinking specifically of Black trans women) to submit their zines for consideration; if they had taken an

interest in proactively helping trans writers organize themselves to produce new works that would be guaranteed a home in print—any one of these measures would have probably doubled the number of trans women of color on their shelves within months. Who gives a shit if these zines aren't what their readers are contacting them about and looking for when they show up to the bookstore? No one knows that they want and need our work because it has hardly had a chance to exist—but if it's put in front of them, they will value our work if they truly believe in any of the same things we do.

Yet if we look at the trans books that are in stock, that are on the lips of the bookstore staff, that receive its attention, it's this: it's the stuff that already makes it

into mainstream publications, the books with agents and publishers behind them, the titles you will probably find at your library because they have the curious capacity of receiving institutional recognition.



The Brooklyn Book Festival that's sponsoring this event with Bluestockings, by the way, is a massive recipient of funding from the Amazon Literary

Partnership: that's hundreds of thousands of dollars across years of patronage. So that's Bluestockings putting itself in tension with Amazon workers for what? A bloodless corporate-sponsored trans literature?

The conflict with these products of publishing isn't just the difference between writers with careers or money (like Casey Plett and Jackie Ess) and writers without even the opportunity to produce recognizable works (myself, most of the authors of the Booklet Series). It's also that the involvement of the former group in publishing will make them into collaborators with institutional violence.

Let's step back and consider that this pattern where propagandists, rich

monsters, and other friends of war criminals at corporate publishing houses are the same people who are now beginning to give book deals to (mostly white, hyper-educated) trans writers. In fact, those editors are the same people who usher forth many of the books that become the must-reads stocked by bookstores, radical or not. The same publishing infrastructure that creates legitimacy for war criminals also extracts profits from the marginalized writers (and their cultures) it targets periodically as a trend.

It feels like every year I've been trying to figure out, "What is the relationship of the bookstore to the poor person?" Every year the answer comes back in a different form, dragging along different evidence, but the

same result: it's an antagonistic relationship. With the radical bookstore, it's no different. It's still property and its allies against the property-less. The radical bookstore may be conflicted, but I know which side I'm on.

# How Many Presses Can Amazon Buy?

All of them.



**Prestige is like armor for a corporation.** By funding small presses—directly through its **Literary Partnership** and indirectly through large grants to **SPD**, **CLMP**, and **other literary non-profits**—Amazon has purchased itself a nice image as a patron of the arts to cover up its exploitation of workers and complicity with state violence. In 2021, Amazon's blood money stains every poet and writer.

\*Even the COVID **Emergency Fund** paid for by the Mellon Foundation (more monopoly blood money) was run by three Amazon-funded organizations: Academy of American Poets, CLMP, and National Book Foundation.



**Incomplete list of Amazon Literary Grant recipients (2009–2021)** based on the available records, recipient websites, and news reports ---- documentation exists for each year listed; dashes indicate a gap in records during which the recipient likely received funding.

826 Valencia / 2021, 2020, 2019

826 DC / 2020

826 NYC / 2021, 2020, 2019

826 Seattle / ---- 2016 ---- 2012 ----

A Gathering of the Tribes / 2021

A Public Space / 2021, 2020, 2019, 2018

Academy of American Poets / 2021, 2020, 2019, 2018

African Voices Communications / 2021

Alaska Quarterly Review / 2021

Alice James Books / 2021, 2020, 2019, 2018

Alliance for Young Artists & Writers / 2018 ---- 2012 ----

American Short Fiction / 2021, 2020

American Society of Journalists and Writers / 2018

Archipelago Books / 2021, 2020, 2019, 2018 ---- 2016 ----

Artist Relief / 2020

Artist Trust / 2020, 2019, 2018

Art Omi: Writers / 2021

Asian American Writers' Workshop / 2021, 2020, 2019, 2018

---- 2016 ---- 2012 ----

ASJA Writers Emergency Assistance Fund / 2021, 2020

Aspen Words / 2021, 2020, 2019

Association of Writers & Writing Programs (AWP) / 2021  
through 2010

Autumn House Press / 2021

Bay Area Book Festival / 2021

Belt Magazine / 2021, 2019

Black Mountain Institute / 2021, 2020, 2019, 2018

BOA Editions / 2021, 2020, 2019  
 Boston Book Festival / 2018  
 Brooklyn Book Festival / 2021, 2020, 2019, 2018 ---- 2016  
 ---- 2012 ----  
 Cave Canem / 2021, 2020, 2019, 2018  
 Center for Black Literature / 2021, 2019  
 Center for the Art of Translation / 2021, 2020  
 Center for Southern Literary Arts / 2018  
 Centrum / 2021, 2020, 2019, 2018  
 Chatos Inhumanos / 2021  
 Chicago Humanities Festival / 2021, 2020, 2019  
 City of Asylum Pittsburgh / 2020  
 CityLit Project / 2021  
 Clarion West / 2021, 2020, 2019, 2018 ---- 2016 ----  
 Coach House Books / ---- 2012 ----  
 Coffee House Press / 2021, 2020, 2019, 2018 ---- 2016 ----  
 2012 ----  
 Community of Literary Magazines and Presses (CLMP) /  
 2021, 2020, 2019, 2018 ---- 2012 ----  
 Community Word Project / 2021, 2020, 2019, 2018  
 Copper Canyon Press / 2021, 2020, 2019, 2018 ---- 2016 --  
 Damascus Outreach Association / 2021  
 Decatur Book Festival / 2021  
 Deep Vellum Publishing / 2021, 2020  
 DSTL Arts / 2021  
 Electric Literature / 2021, 2020, 2019, 2018  
 Empowering Latino Futures / 2021  
 Feminist Press / 2021, 2020, 2019  
 Furious Flower Poetry Center / 2021, 2020, 2019  
 Girls Write Now / 2021, 2020, 2019, 2018 ---- 2016 ----  
 2012 ----  
 Graywolf Press / 2021, 2020, 2019, 2018 ---- 2016 ----  
 Grubstreet / 2019, 2018

Hanging Loose Press / ---- 2012 ----  
 Hedgebrook / 2021, 2020, 2019, 2018 ---- 2016 ----  
 Heyday / 2021  
 House of SpeakEasy / 2021, 2020, 2019  
 Hub City Press / 2021, 2020, 2019  
 Hugo House / 2021, 2020, 2019, 2018  
 Humanities Washington / 2021, 2020, 2019, 2018  
 Indiana Writers Center / 2021, 2020, 2019, 2018  
 Inprint / 2019  
 Kundiman / 2021, 2020, 2019  
 Jack Jones Literary Arts / 2019  
 KCRW Foundation / 2019  
 Kenyon Review / 2019, 2018 ---- 2012 ----  
 Kundiman / 2019, 2018  
 Kweli Journal / 2021, 2020  
 Lambda Literary / 2021, 2020, 2019, 2018 ---- 2012 ----  
 Lighthouse Writers Workshop / 2021, 2020, 2019, 2018  
 LitNet / 2021, 2020  
 Litquake Foundation / 2021  
 Loft Literary Center / 2021, 2020, 2019, 2018 ---- 2016 ----  
 2014? ----  
 Log Cabin Literary Center / 2019  
 Los Angeles Review of Books / ---- 2012 ----  
 MacDowell / 2021, 2020, 2019, 2018  
 Manoa: A Pacific Journal of International Writing / 2021,  
 2020  
 Mineral School / 2018  
 McPherson & Co / ---- 2012 ----  
 Milkweed Editions / 2021, 2020, 2019  
 Mizna / 2021, 2020  
 Narrative 4 / 2021, 2020, 2019  
 Narrative Magazine / 2021, 2020, 2019, 2018 ---- 2016 ----  
 National Book Critics Circle Board / 2020

National Book Foundation / 2021, 2020, 2019, 2018, 2017,  
 2016  
 National Novel Writing Month / 2021, 2020, 2019, 2018  
 National Poetry Series / 2021, 2020, 2019, 2018  
 New York Writers Coalition / 2018 ---- 2016 ---- 2012 ----  
 Nightboat Books / 2021, 2020, 2019  
 Nuyorican Poets Cafe / 2021, 2020, 2019  
 Obsidian: Literature & Arts in the African Diaspora / 2021  
 O, Miami / 2021, 2020  
 Open Letter Books / Best Translated Book Award / 2020  
 through 2011  
 One Story / 2021, 2020, 2019, 2018, ---- 2016 ---- 2012 --  
 Oxford American / 2021, 2020, 2019, 2018  
 Path with Art / 2019  
 PEN America / 2021, 2020, 2019, 2018, ---- 2016 ---- 2014?  
 ---- 2012 ----  
 PEN America Writer's Emergency Fund / 2020  
 Pen Parentis / 2018  
 PM Press / ---- 2012 ----  
 Poets & Writers. / 2021, 2020, 2019, 2018 ---- 2014? ----  
 2012 ----  
 Poet's House / 2020, 2019  
 Poets Wear Prada / ---- 2012 ----  
 Poetry Northwest / 2021  
 Poetry Society of America / 2021, 2020, 2019, 2018  
 Ploughshares / 2019  
 Pongo Poetry Project / 2021  
 Portland Review / 2019  
 Red Hen Press / 2019  
 Restless Books / 2021, 2020, 2019  
 Roots. Wounds. Words. / 2021  
 Sarabande Books / 2018  
 Scoundrel Time / 2019

Seattle Arts & Lectures / 2021, 2020, 2019, 2018 ----- 2016

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Seattle City of Literature / 2021, 2020, 2019, 2018

Seattle Public Library / 2020, 2019

Seattle7Writers / 2018

Scalawag / 2019

Shared Worlds / 2016

Shout Mouse Press / 2021

Slice Literary / 2012, 2020, 2019, 2018 ----- 2016 -----

Small Press Distribution / 2020, 2019, 2018

Society of the Muse of the Southwest (SOMOS) / 2021

Solstice: A Magazine of Diverse Voices / 2019

Spark Central / 2018

Teachers & Writers Collaborative / 2018

The American Literary Translators Association / 2021

The Authors League Fund / 2018

The Cabin / 2021

The Common / 2021, 2020, 2019

The Inner Loop / 2021, 2020, 2019

The Center for Fiction / 2021, 2020, 2019, 2018 ----- 2016

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The Greater Seattle Bureau of Fearless Ideas / 2018

The Moth / 2021, 2020, 2019, 2018 ----- 2016 -----

The Africa Center / 2021, 2020

The Literary Review / 2019

The Paris Review / 2021, 2020

The Telling Room / 2021, 2020, 2019

The Tenth Academy / 2021

The Writer's Block / 2020, 2019, 2018

The Writers' Colony at Dairy Hollow / 2021

Torrey House Press / 2021

Town Hall Seattle / 2021, 2020, 2019, 2018

Transit Books / 2021, 2020, 2019

Tupelo Quarterly / 2021  
 Turtle Point Press / 2021  
 Ucross Foundation / 2021, 2020, 2019  
 Undocupoets / 2021, 2020, 2019  
 University of Arizona Poetry Center/CantoMundo / 2021,  
 2020, 2019, 2018  
 University of Washington Creative Writing Program / 2021,  
 2020, 2019, 2018  
 Urban Word NYC/National Youth Poet Laureate / 2021,  
 2020  
 VIDA: Women In Literary Arts / 2018  
 Voices from War / 2018  
 Voice of Witness / ---- 2012  
 Washington Center for the Book / 2021, 2020, 2019, 2018  
 Washington State Historical Society / 2019  
 White Pine Press / 2021, 2020, 2019  
 Woodland Pattern Book Center / 2021  
 Words Without Borders / 2021, 2020, 2019, 2018 ---- 2016  
 ---- 2012 ----  
 WriteGirl / 2021, 2020, 2019, 2018, ---- 2016 ----  
 Writers in the Schools / 2021, 2020, 2019  
 Writers' League of Texas / 2018  
 Writers Room / 2021, 2018  
 Yaddo / 2021, 2020, 2019  
 Young Writers Project / 2020, 2019  
 Zephyr Press / 2021, 2020  
 Zoeglossia / 2021, 2020  
 Zora Neale Hurston/Richard Wright Foundation / 2021,  
 2020, 2019  
 Zyzzyva / 2021, 2020, 2019

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1.  
**Why Poetry?**

2.  
**Radical Scabs,  
Radical Snitches**

3.  
**Mutual Aid Printing  
and the Pandemic**

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